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The University of
Montana

UNIVERSITY RELATIONS • MISSOULA, MT 59812 • 406-243-2522 • FAX: 406-243-4520

NEWS RELEASE

March 26, 2004

Contact: Steve Running, NTSG director, (406) 243-6311.

GLOBAL WARMING IMPACTS MONTANA WATER SUPPLIES

MISSOULA —

The Montana Climate Center Web site features a new article about how steadily rising temperatures are threatening the American West's hidden reservoir: mountain snow.

The article, "As the West Goes Dry," can be found at
http://climate.ntsg.umt.edu/html/science_western_water.pdf.

Published in the Feb. 20 issue of the journal Science, the article summarizes a major new study on snowpack and streamflow trends in the western United States. The study found that since 1950, springtime snowpack has declined 15 percent to 30 percent in Montana, and springtime peak river flows have come an average of two weeks earlier.

The study also contends that if even the most moderate regional warming predictions come true during the next 50 years, some western snowpacks will drop by 60 percent. This means less water will be available during the parched summer months for everything from agriculture and hydropower production to sustaining fish habitats.

These trends also are important for projecting wintertime game population survival, optimum spring crop planting dates, livestock breeding schedules and other practical decisions related to the winter/spring transition. Finally, earlier snowmelt initiates summer landscape drying that ultimately results in increased wildfire danger.

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University of Montana Professor Steve Running said, "These hydrologic trends clearly illustrate that global warming already is occurring in Montana. What is disconcerting is that we expect these trends to accelerate in the next 50 years, leaving us with very marginal winter snowpacks -- the reservoir we use for summer water supplies."

UM started the Montana Climate Center last fall to provide detailed information on weather, climate, snow, fire, and agriculture, and periodic reports of interest to Montana. The center is operate by UM's Numerical Terradynamic Simulation Group, which crafts software for NASA environmental satellites. The center's main Web site is <http://climate.ntsg.umt.edu>.

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